

4VAC15-50-81. Game: Bear: Validating Tags and Checking Bear by Licensee or Permittee.

Summary:

This proposal would allow an option for a licensed hunter or permittee to check bears electronically while still requiring the necessary biological samples to be submitted.

Proposed language of amendment:

4VAC15-50-81. Validating Tags, ~~and~~ Checking Bear and Tooth Submission by Licensee or Permittee.

A. Any person killing a bear shall, before removing the carcass from the place of kill, validate an appropriate tag on their special license for hunting bear or special permit by completely removing the designated notch area from the tag. Place of kill shall be defined as the location where the animal is first reduced to possession. It shall be unlawful for any person to validate (notch) a bear tag from any special license for hunting bear or special permit prior to the killing of a bear. A bear tag that is mistakenly validated (notched) prior to the killing of a bear must be immediately voided by the licensee or permittee by writing, in ink, the word "VOID" on the line provided on the license tag.

B. Upon killing a bear and validating (notching) a license tag or special permit, as provided in subsection A of this section, the licensee shall, upon vehicle transport of the carcass or at the conclusion of legal hunting hours, whichever occurs first, and without unnecessary delay, present the carcass and validated (notched) license tag or special permit to an authorized bear checking station or to an appropriate representative of the department in the county or adjoining county in which the bear was killed or report the kill through the department's automated harvest reporting system. At such time, the person checking or reporting the carcass will be given a black bear check card furnished by the department or a confirmation number from the automated reporting system. The successful hunter shall then immediately record the game check card number or confirmation number, in ink, on the line provided on the tag that was validated (notched) in the field. If checked at an authorized bear check station, the black bear check card must be kept in possession with the carcass until the carcass is processed. If the carcass is left unattended, the bear check card must be securely attached to the carcass. If the kill is reported using the automated harvest reporting system, no check card is required as long as the hunter who killed the animal is in possession of the carcass. If the automated harvest reported carcass is left unattended or transferred to the possession of another individual, written documentation including the successful hunter's full name, the date the animal was killed, and the confirmation number must be created and kept in possession with the carcass until the carcass is processed. If the carcass is left unattended, this written documentation must be securely attached to the carcass. Processed carcass parts of a bear killed legally in Virginia may be transported; however, upon request of any authorized law-enforcement officer, sufficient verbal or written information necessary to properly establish legal possession must be furnished immediately.

C. If the carcass is checked at a bear check station, upon presentation of the carcass and validated (notched) license tag or special permit to the bear checking station, the licensee shall surrender or allow to be removed one premolar tooth from the carcass. At such time, the person checking the carcass will be given a game check card. The successful hunter shall then immediately record the game check card number, in ink, on the line provided adjacent to the license tag that was validated (notched) in the field. The game check card must be kept in possession with the carcass until the carcass is processed. If the carcass is left unattended, the game check card must be securely attached to the carcass. If the kill is reported through the department's automated harvest reporting system, a premolar must be removed by the hunter immediately after reporting the kill. The premolar shall be placed in an envelope furnished by the department and labeled with the hunter's full name, check confirmation number, date of kill and the

sex of the harvested bear. This envelope with premolar and accompanying information must be mailed or delivered to the department no later than 14 days after the close of the bear harvest season.

~~B. D.~~ It shall be unlawful for any person to destroy the identity of the ~~(sex)~~ of any bear killed unless and until the license tag or special permit is validated (notched) and checked as required by this section. Successful bear hunters are allowed to dismember the carcass to pack it out from the place of kill, after an appropriate license tag has been validated (notched) as required ~~above in subsection A of this section~~, as long as they do not destroy the identity of the sex of the animal remains identifiable and all the parts of the carcass are present when the bear is checked at an authorized bear checking station or reported through the automated harvest reporting system. Any bear found in the possession of any person without a validated (notched) license tag or documentation that the bear has been checked at an authorized bear checking station or automated harvest system as required by this section shall be forfeited to the Commonwealth to be disposed of as provided by law.

Rationale

Since 1947, data collected through the DGIF's big game check station system have been the cornerstone of Virginia's bear, deer, and turkey management programs. This system has allowed DGIF to effectively monitor annual big game harvests on a county basis for over 60 years. By regulation, successful bear hunters are required to "tag" every harvested bear at the place of kill and subsequently check it at a check station to receive an official game check card. Information regarding the animal's sex, date of kill, weapon, and county of kill is recorded. Prior to 1991, all check stations (~1,500) were also authorized to check bears. To ensure additional quality in bear harvest data, regulation changes for the 1991 bear hunting season designated about 60 special bear checking stations. In addition to recording the usual harvest data (e.g., sex, weapon, location), these volunteer bear check stations also record whether bear hounds were used, extract a small premolar tooth for age determination, attach a special harvest seal to the carcass, and determine presence of ear tags or lip tattoos (indicative of previous capture for research or relocation in conflict situations). Today, more than 140 bear check stations are maintained throughout Virginia, and a tooth is collected from more than 95% of harvested bears. The age information resulting from the premolar provides key data for population reconstruction and is also of interest to hunters. Along with harvest trends, population reconstruction provides an index of both statewide and regional population changes.

Beginning in 2004, a telephone-checking option was introduced to supplement the traditional check station system for deer and spring turkeys. The proportion of the deer harvest reported electronically via phone, internet, and the mobile app has grown from 44% in 2004 to 85% in 2018. To maintain the integrity of data collected at special bear check stations (especially collection of teeth for aging), checking bears by telephone was not permitted. Due to technological advances, it is now possible to make the bear harvest checking procedure more convenient for hunters while ensuring the continued collection of sufficient biological and hunter data necessary for management decisions.